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POLICIES AND BEST PRACTICES

MARINE MAMMAL STRANDING RESPONSE,
REHABILITATION, AND RELEASE

**Minimum Standard Qualifications for a Marine Mammal
Stranding Program Agreement
(New Applicants and Renewals)**

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Note: *The decision to enter into an Agreement under which a [person], organization, or institution may take species under the Marine Mammal Protection Act for the purpose of stranding response is solely at the discretion of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). NMFS is not compelled to enter into a Stranding Agreement based on an interested party's compliance with these criteria. NMFS weighs the geographical need, level of expertise, stranding related activities, cooperation, and requirements listed below as to whether to renew or issue a new Stranding Agreement.*

Brackets [Reserved for the NMFS Regional Administrator]

A. Qualifications for Response to Dead Stranded Marine Mammals - First Response (Stranding Article III Authorization):

Note. If the prospective Stranding Network Participant submits information that demonstrates to the NMFS Regional Administrator that it meets all of the criteria below [[required documentation will be prescribed by the NMFS Regional Administrator, unless indicated below](#)] and a Stranding Agreement is needed in the area as determined by the NMFS Regional Administrator, a probationary Stranding Agreement may be issued for a period of **one year**. At the end of the provisional period, NMFS will review the performance of the Stranding Network Participant under the terms and conditions of the Stranding Agreement. If NMFS determines that services rendered by the Stranding Network Participant under the Stranding Agreement during the provisional period have been satisfactory, the Agreement may be extended for up to **six years**. A NMFS Regional Administrator may direct review of the performance of a Stranding Network Participant under the terms and responsibilities of a Stranding Agreement at any time (including on-site inspections), and the results of such a review may be used when renewal of a Stranding Agreement is being considered. The Agreement may be terminated upon 30 days written notice by the Stranding Network Participant or by the NMFS Regional Administrator. If found in noncompliance, the Stranding Network Participant will be notified of any deficiency and given a time line deemed appropriate by the NMFS Regional Administrator to rectify such deficiencies. ⁽¹⁾

1. The NMFS Regional Administrator must determine that there is a geographic need for a Stranding Network Participant in the proposed response area. This determination is within the NMFS Regional Administrator's discretion based on, but not limited to, the following factors: [\[x, y, and z; e.g., the historic amount of stranded marine mammals in an area, the amount of personnel and resources of stranding network participants with existing agreements in the proposed response area, the geographic extent of the proposed response area, the proximity of the existing and prospective stranding network participants to the proposed response area\]](#).
2. The prospective Stranding Network Participant must be an [\[established\]](#) organization or facility [\[or affiliated with an agency, university, or organization\]](#) that abides by the

Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), Endangered Species Act, and Animal Welfare Act and promotes the conservation of marine mammals. The prospective Stranding Network Participant must follow applicable NMFS regulations, policies, and/or guidelines, as well as abide by all other applicable local, state and Federal laws, regulations, policies, and/or guidelines when conducting activities under the Stranding Agreement. The NMFS Regional Administrator shall require the prospective Stranding Network Participant to submit relevant documentation [permits, authorizations, agreements, etc.] for review prior to entering into any Stranding Agreement or at any subsequent time when the documentation becomes relevant to performance under the Agreement. If the prospective Stranding Network Participant is a new organization or new facility, then it must fulfill a need specifically identified by the NMFS Regional Administrator.⁽²⁾

3. The director or primary representative of the prospective Stranding Network Participant should have apprenticed under the direct supervision of an existing Stranding Network Participant or NMFS [for at least three years] or have comparable experience in marine mammal stranding response.⁽²⁾ The prospective Stranding Network Participant may apprentice under a “designee” status to obtain this experience. If it is a new organization or facility, then it must fulfill a need specifically identified by the NMFS Regional Administrator. The NMFS Regional Administrator shall require the prospective Stranding Network Participant to submit documentation of experience [e.g., CV, resume, certificates, etc.] for review prior to entering into any Stranding Agreement and the documentation shall be kept on file at the NMFS Regional Office.
4. The prospective Stranding Network Participant must have and maintain at least two employees or volunteers each with a minimum of one year of continuous hands-on experience in marine mammal stranding response or comparable training, one of whom will be on-site or supervising when animals are being examined.⁽²⁾ The NMFS Regional Administrator shall require the prospective Stranding Network Participant to submit documentation of experience [e.g., CV, resume, certificates, etc.] for review prior to entering into any Stranding Agreement and the documentation shall be kept on file at the NMFS Regional Office.
5. The prospective Stranding Network Participant must have participated in NMFS approved training or have documented and approved experience necessary to obtain accurate Level A stranding data and to conduct basic tissue sample (Level B) collection. The NMFS Regional Administrator shall require the prospective Stranding Network Participant to submit documentation of experience [e.g., CV, resume, certificates, etc.] for review prior to entering into any Stranding Agreement and the documentation shall be kept on file at the NMFS Regional Office. In the event of key personnel and/or key volunteer turnover, the Stranding Network Participant will notify the NMFS Regional Administrator in writing and provide CVs of new personnel and/or volunteers.
6. The prospective Stranding Network Participant must communicate in a professional

manner, and cooperate with NMFS, other network members, the general public, local and state agencies. We also encourage cooperation with authorized marine mammal researchers.

7. The prospective Stranding Network Participant must have and maintain equipment appropriate to the stranding response - i.e., for dead animal response the equipment list includes those items necessary for Level A data collection. (A complete list of equipment available shall be provided by the prospective Stranding Network Participant, and shall be updated with each renewal of the Stranding Agreement).

B. Qualifications for Response, Triage and Transport of Live Stranded Marine Mammals (Article IV Authorization):

Note. If the prospective Stranding Network Participant submits information that demonstrates to the NMFS Regional Administrator that it meets all of the criteria below ([\[required documentation will be prescribed by the NMFS Regional Administrator, unless indicated below\]](#)) and a Stranding Agreement is needed in the area as determined by the NMFS Regional Administrator, a probationary Stranding Agreement may be issued for a period of **one year**. At the end of the provisional period, NMFS will review the performance of the Stranding Network Participant under the terms and conditions of the Stranding Agreement. If NMFS determines that services rendered by the Stranding Network Participant under the Stranding Agreement during the provisional period have been satisfactory, the Agreement may be extended for up to **three years**. A NMFS Regional Administrator may direct review of the performance of a Stranding Network Participant under the terms and responsibilities of a Stranding Agreement at any time (including on-site inspections), and the results of such a review may be used when renewal of a Stranding Agreement is being considered. The Agreement may be terminated upon 30 days written notice by the Stranding Network Participant or by the NMFS Regional Administrator. If found in noncompliance, the Stranding Network Participant will be notified of any deficiency and given a time line deemed appropriate by the NMFS Regional Administrator to rectify such deficiencies.⁽¹⁾

1. The NMFS Regional Administrator must determine that there is a geographic need for a Stranding Network Participant in the proposed response area. This determination is within the NMFS Regional Administrator's discretion based on, but not limited to, the following factors: [\[x, y, and z; e.g., the historic amount of stranded marine mammals in an area, the amount of personnel and resources of stranding network participants with existing agreements in the proposed response area, the geographic extent of the proposed response area, the proximity of the existing and prospective stranding network participants to the proposed response area\]](#).
2. The prospective Stranding Network Participant must be an [\[established\]](#) organization or facility [\[or affiliated with an agency, university, or organization\]](#) that abides by the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), Endangered Species Act, and Animal Welfare Act and promotes the conservation of marine mammals. The prospective Stranding

Network Participant must follow applicable NMFS regulations, policies, and/or guidelines, as well as abide by all other applicable local, state and Federal laws, regulations, policies, and/or guidelines when conducting activities under the Stranding Agreement. The NMFS Regional Administrator shall require the prospective Stranding Network Participant to submit relevant documentation [permits, authorizations, agreements, etc.] for review prior to entering into any Stranding Agreement or at any subsequent time when the documentation becomes relevant to performance under the Agreement. If the prospective Stranding Network Participant is a new organization or new facility, then it must fulfill a need specifically identified by the NMFS Regional Administrator.⁽²⁾

3. The director or primary representative of the prospective Stranding Network Participant should have apprenticed under the direct supervision of an existing Stranding Network Participant or NMFS [for at least three years] or have comparable experience in marine mammal stranding response.⁽²⁾ The prospective Stranding Network Participant may apprentice under a “designee” status to obtain this experience. If it is a new organization or facility, then it must fulfill a need specifically identified by the NMFS Regional Administrator. The NMFS Regional Administrator shall require the prospective Stranding Network Participant to submit documentation of experience [e.g., CV, resume, certificates, etc.] for review prior to entering into any Stranding Agreement and the documentation shall be kept on file at the NMFS Regional Office.
4. The prospective Stranding Network Participant must have and maintain at least two employees or volunteers each with a minimum of one year of continuous hands-on experience in marine mammal stranding response, triage, transport, and/or euthanasia, or comparable training, one of whom will be on-site or supervising when animals are being examined.⁽²⁾ The NMFS Regional Administrator shall require the prospective Stranding Network Participant to submit documentation of experience [e.g., CV, resume, certificates, etc.] for review prior to entering into any Stranding Agreement and the documentation shall be kept on file at the NMFS Regional Office. In the event of key personnel and/or key volunteer turnover, the Stranding Network Participant will notify the NMFS Regional Administrator in writing and provide CVs of new personnel and/or volunteers.
5. The prospective Stranding Network Participant must have participated in NMFS approved training or have documented and approved experience necessary to obtain accurate Level A stranding data and to conduct basic tissue sample (Level B) collection. The NMFS Regional Administrator shall require the prospective Stranding Network Participant to submit documentation of experience [e.g., CV, resume, certificates, etc.] for review prior to entering into any Stranding Agreement and the documentation shall be kept on file at the NMFS Regional Office.
6. The prospective Stranding Network Participant must communicate in a professional manner, and cooperate with NMFS, other network members, the general public, local and

state agencies. We also encourage cooperation with authorized marine mammal researchers.

7. The prospective Stranding Network Participant must have and maintain equipment appropriate to the stranding response, - i.e., for live animal response the equipment list includes those items necessary for triage, transport, and/or euthanasia, corresponding to the request. (A complete list of equipment available shall be provided by the prospective Stranding Network Participant, and shall be updated with each renewal of the Stranding Agreement).

C. Qualifications for Rehabilitation and Release of Live Stranded Marine Mammals (Article V Authorization):

Note. These qualifications are in addition to those listed in Section B for Response, Triage, and Transport of Live Stranded Marine Mammals.

Note. If the prospective Stranding Network Participant submits information that demonstrates to the NMFS Regional Administrator that it meets all of the criteria below [\[required documentation will be prescribed by the NMFS Regional Administrator, unless indicated below\]](#) and a Stranding Agreement is needed in the area as determined by the NMFS Regional Administrator, a probationary Stranding Agreement may be issued for a period of **one year**. At the end of the provisional period, NMFS will review the performance of the Stranding Network Participant under the terms and conditions of the Stranding Agreement. If NMFS determines that services rendered by the Stranding Network Participant under the Stranding Agreement during the provisional period have been satisfactory, the Agreement may be extended for up to **three years**. A NMFS Regional Administrator may direct review of the performance of a Stranding Network Participant under the terms and conditions of a Stranding Agreement at any time (including on-site inspections), and the results of such a review may be used when renewal of a Stranding Agreement is being considered. The Agreement may be terminated upon 30 days written notice by the Stranding Network Participant or by the NMFS Regional Administrator. If found in noncompliance, the Stranding Network Participant will be notified of any deficiency and given a time line deemed appropriate by the NMFS Regional Administrator to rectify such deficiencies.⁽¹⁾

1. The director or primary representative of the prospective Stranding Network Participant must have experience or education leading to an understanding of the life history, natural behavior, biology, physiology and animal husbandry of applicable marine mammals. The NMFS Regional Administrator shall require the prospective Stranding Network Participant to submit documentation of experience [\[e.g., CV, resume, certificates, etc.\]](#) for review prior to entering into any Stranding Agreement and the documentation shall be kept on file at the NMFS Regional Office.
2. The prospective Stranding Network Participant must have at least two staff members

each with a minimum of three years of continuous hands-on experience in marine mammal care and rehabilitation (i.e., by apprenticing with or working in an experienced institution for three years) and are familiar with any applicable NMFS rehabilitation facility and release guidelines and regulations. The NMFS Regional Administrator shall require the prospective Stranding Network Participant to submit documentation of experience [e.g., CV, resume, certificates, etc.] for review prior to entering into any Stranding Agreement and the documentation shall be kept on file at the NMFS Regional Office. In the event of key personnel and/or key volunteer turnover, the Stranding Network Participant will notify the NMFS Regional Administrator in writing and provide CVs of new personnel and/or volunteers.

3. The prospective Stranding Network Participant must have and maintain an attending veterinarian experienced in marine mammal care who is willing to assume responsibility for diagnosis, treatment, and medical clearance for release. The attending veterinarian will provide a schedule of veterinary care that will include a review of husbandry records, visual and physical examinations of all the marine mammals in rehabilitation, and a periodic visual inspection of the facilities. The NMFS Regional Administrator shall require the prospective Stranding Network Participant to submit documentation of the attending veterinarian's experience [e.g., CV, resume, certificates, etc.] for review prior to entering into any Stranding Agreement and the documentation shall be kept on file at the NMFS Regional Office.
4. The prospective Stranding Network Participant must have a trained volunteer base sufficient to initiate and maintain adequate and appropriate marine mammal care and husbandry. Staff caring for animals should be sufficiently trained to carry out veterinary procedures under the direction of the veterinarian.

The prospective Stranding Network Participant must have sufficient physical and financial resources to maintain appropriate animal care. The NMFS Regional Administrator shall require the prospective Stranding Network Participant to submit a facility operation manual for review prior to entering into any Stranding Agreement. This manual must include, but not be limited to, standard operating procedures and documentation for the following: ⁽³⁾

- Housing and Spacing
- Water Quality
- Quarantine
- Sanitation
- Food Handling and Preparation
- Veterinary Medical Care
- Diagnostic Testing
- Record Keeping
- Euthanasia
- Health and Safety for Personnel

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- Contingency Plans (natural disasters, unplanned and planned events)
- Counterconditioning/Deconditioning
- Proof of Financial Stability
- Proof of Long Term Lease or Title to the Facility

Operations must be consistent with applicable NMFS policies, guidelines, directives, and regulations and other applicable State and Federal policies, guidelines, directives, regulations, and laws. See NMFS Interim Standards for Rehabilitation Facilities.

⁽¹⁾ In order to renew an existing Stranding Agreement, the applicant must demonstrate past compliance with the terms and responsibilities of their Stranding Agreement, including reporting requirements and deadlines.

⁽²⁾ Due to the unique geographic and demographic situation in Alaska and Pacific Islands Region excluding Hawaii, guidelines [1] [2], and [3] may be waived based on the discretion of the NMFS Regional Administrator.

⁽³⁾ If long-term care is not feasible, a plan for disposition of live marine mammals at alternate care facilities must be submitted.